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Understanding Consumer Enjoyment and Happiness

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SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY

Understanding Consumer Enjoyment and Happiness

Tonya P. Williams, Northwestern University
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SESSION OVERVIEW

A recent focus in consumer research is on improving consumer welfare and the quality of life. Consistent with this focus, this session aims to make the important first steps toward understanding how consumer welfare may be improved by adopting a systematic approach to examine what contributes to consumer subjective well-being (SWB; i.e., what makes consumers happy), and how to measure it. The three papers seek to take a closer look at what happiness means to different people, what type of TV viewing behavior would make people happier, and how happiness should be measured and compared.

The first paper by Williams and Lee examines the relationship between wealth and SWB. The authors define transaction wealth as assets associated with material possessions and exchange value, and relationship wealth as assets associated with security from close relationships. They argue that those with an independent self-construal derive more happiness from transaction than relationship wealth, and the reverse is true for those with an interdependent self-construal. The authors present the results of four studies in support of their hypothesis. Across these studies, self-construal is operationalized as a personal disposition, a cultural orientation, and as a situational prime. Their results also demonstrate the implications of the two distinct self-construals on helping behavior: Independents are more likely to donate money to a charity than interdependents, whereas interdependents are more likely to contribute by volunteering to the charity than independents.

Whereas the first paper approaches happiness from an overall life satisfaction perspective, the second paper by Mandel and Nowlis examines happiness from a more focused, situation-based angle. More specifically, they propose to understand some of the factors underlying consumers' enjoyment of popular game shows on TV (e.g., *The Weakest Link*, *Fear Factor*). The prevalence of office pools and online betting websites suggest that predicting the outcome of the game or competition enhances a viewer's enjoyment while watching these hugely popular TV shows that involve audience participation with uncertain outcomes. However, the authors find that participants who made outcome predictions enjoyed the show less than those who simply watched the show, especially when they were made accountable for their predictions. These effects were observed despite participants' expectations to the contrary.

In the third paper, Hsee discusses how happiness should be measured to capture the true construct of life satisfaction and happiness that researchers are interested in. More specifically, this research highlights the problem with traditional Likert scales used to measure feelings of happiness in that the scales are susceptible to scale-renorming (i.e., respondents are prone to interpret the scales differently in different contexts). As a result, researchers may confuse spurious difference in people's responses to life satisfaction and happiness scales with real differences in their subjective well-being. Hsee proposes a modulus-based approach to measure happiness to enhance construct validity in happiness-related research.

The theme of the session is in line with the mission of the conference to make a positive difference in the lives of consumers. Together, the three papers address an important gap in consumer research by focusing on consumer welfare. The papers contribute to

the literature methodologically as well as theoretically, and the results have implications for both researchers and practitioners. This research represents critical first steps toward understanding and improving consumers' quality of life and subjective well-being. Dipankar Chakravarti as discussant raised interesting issues regarding how consumer psychologists can more actively enable a better understanding of subjective well-being, and how it can be enhanced.

“Benjamin My Friend or My Money: Wealth and Subjective Well-Being”

*Tonya P. Williams, Northwestern University
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The relationship between Subjective Well-Being (SWB) and wealth has been examined extensively in an attempt to expose causality. Although there is a general belief that wealth leads to SWB, unambiguous evidence of a causal relationship is still lacking (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Csikszentmihalyi 1999; Easterlin 2004; King and Napa 1998; Myers 2000; Ormel et al. 1999). In fact, recent research shows that wealth, as defined and operationalized in economic terms (e.g., GNP), does not further increase SWB beyond attaining biological needs of food and housing (Diener et al. 1995; Diener and Fujita 1995; Diener and Oishi 2000; Tatzel 2003). More specifically, Diener et al. (1995) examined the relationship between wealth and SWB across 20 different nations representing different cultures, and found that GNP and SWB are positively correlated ($r=.55$), as are individualism and SWB ($r=.77$). However, in a more recent study, Diener (2002) found that the correlation between income and SWB within each nation is tenuous (ranges from $-.06$ in Germany to $.45$ in poor areas in Calcutta). If wealth does not imply SWB or happiness, then what does? The objective of the current research is to understand what makes people happy, and to further examine the relationship between wealth and SWB.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, wealth is defined as “all property that has a money value or an exchange value” or “abundance of valuable possessions or resources.” While the concept of wealth as money and worldly possessions is familiar to most people, it is interesting to note that resource is defined in the same dictionary as “a means of spending leisure time.” Our own experience tells us that spending leisure time does not always involve money; being with friends and family, for instance, is often a very enjoyable way to spend leisure time. And Mother Theresa once said “the most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.” Thus, to understand what affects SWB, we may need to start with a broader conceptualization of wealth that also includes close relationships.

Although most people would agree that material possessions as well as family and friends all contribute to wealth and in turn happiness, our view is that those with an independent self-construal are more likely to emphasize personal desires and possessions (termed transaction wealth), whereas those with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to focus on communal desires and relationships (termed relationship wealth). Across four studies, we provide convergent evidence in support of this hypothesis.

In Study 1, participants were presented with pictures of smiling people (individuals as well as groups), and were asked to indicate how happy they thought these people were, and the extent

to which these people had transaction or relationship wealth. Participants' chronic self-construal was measured using the Independence-Interdependence Scale (Singelis 1994). The results showed that the more independent participants were, the more likely they thought happiness comes from transaction wealth, and the more interdependent they were, the more likely they thought happiness comes from relationship wealth.

In Study 2, we used a 2 (country: Chinese, US) x (self-construal: independent, interdependent) x 2 (wealth: transaction, relationship) between-participant design, and self-construal was manipulated by country status as well as by priming. Participants were presented with an "ideal life" situation that either emphasized transaction wealth (e.g., I/We live in a comfortable home) or relationship wealth (e.g., I am/We are surrounded by friends who care about me/us), and were asked to indicate how happy they would be if they were in that situation. The results showed that among our U.S. participants, independents were happier with transaction wealth than relationship wealth, whereas the reverse was true of the interdependents. However, among our Chinese participants, both independents and interdependents derived more happiness from relationship than from transaction wealth.

We also examined the behavioral implications of these results on happiness by investigating whether independents versus interdependents might be more willing to contribute money or volunteer time to a charity (Study 3). We first primed participants with either an independent or an interdependent self-construal and then presented them with an ad for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Our results showed that independents were more likely to donate money as compared to the interdependents, whereas the interdependents were more likely to volunteer their time than the independents. We present further evidence showing that independents valued a monetary contribution to community projects higher than interdependents, whereas the reverse was true for volunteering.

Our results across four studies provide convergent support for our hypothesis that for those with an independent self-construal, financial possessions bring about greater SWB, whereas for those with an interdependent self-construal, relationship harmony and belongingness bring about greater SWB. These findings enrich our understanding of what makes people happy, and offers one explanation to account for the tenuous relationship between SWB and wealth documented in the literature.

"The Effect of Prediction on the Enjoyment of a Consumption Experience"

Naomi Mandel, Arizona State University

Stephen M. Nowlis, Arizona State University

Does predicting the outcome of a television show enhance a consumer's enjoyment while watching the show? For example, if a consumer is watching a game show like *Survivor*, she might explicitly predict the winner of this show by participating in an office pool, message board, or through online betting. Alternatively, this consumer might just watch *Survivor* without making any explicit predictions about who the ultimate winner will be.

One line of research suggests that people enjoy the feeling of suspense, and that predictions can increase the involvement with a task and heighten suspense (Caplin and Leahy 2001). This research would predict that consumers will end up liking a hedonic experience *more* if they make a prediction in advance.

Another line of research suggests that consumers attempt to minimize the uncertainty they experience toward events (McGregor and Marigold 2003; Wu 1999) and that uncertainty can lead to anxiety (Arai 1997). When consumers make explicit predictions about the outcome of an uncertain hedonic event, this can increase

feelings of anxiety and *lower* the enjoyment of a hedonic experience.

Our results support the second of these predictions, that making predictions lowers the enjoyment of a hedonic event. Across a series of four experiments, we found that participants who made outcome predictions enjoyed the show significantly less than those who did not make predictions, despite participants' expectations to the contrary.

In study 1, participants watched a video clip from the game show *The Weakest Link* and then answered questions about it. Participants who predicted which contestant would win the current round of the game demonstrated a significantly lower level of enjoyment than those who did not make predictions ($M=0.81$ vs. 2.69 on a 7-point scale; $F(1, 144)=9.25, p<.005$). In fact, participants who were told in advance who would win the round demonstrated the highest level of enjoyment ($M=3.00$).

In study 2, we wanted to see whether participants' expectations about their enjoyment in these conditions would match their actual enjoyment, and we found that they didn't. While participants believed, in hypothetical scenarios, that they would be happiest watching *The Wheel of Fortune* after predicting the outcome, and least happy when the outcome was revealed before watching, in fact the opposite was true. Replicating our findings in study 1, we found that participants were least happy when they had to write down their predictions before watching the show.

In our third study, we explored the moderating effects of accuracy and certainty on our results, and found that the combination of both accuracy and certainty is required for prediction to enhance viewing enjoyment. Participants who were both highly certain of their predictions and correct were significantly more likely to enjoy the clip ($M=4.29$) than were those who were certain but incorrect ($M=2.00$), uncertain but correct ($M=2.43$), or uncertain and incorrect ($M=1.92$; $F(1, 63)=4.07, p<.05$).

In study 4, we found that these effects became even more pronounced when individuals were made accountable for their predictions. We manipulated three levels of accountability: High (where participants were told they would have to explain their predictions to a group), Low (where participants were told that their answers were unimportant), and Control (where no instructions were given). Consistent with our findings in prior studies, participants who made predictions enjoyed a *Fear Factor* clip less ($M=1.98$ vs. 3.24 ; $F(1, 244)=10.38, p<.001$) and were less likely to want to keep watching the show ($M=2.13$ vs. 3.73 ; $F(1, 244)=16.55, p<.0001$) than were those who did not make predictions. A series of planned comparisons revealed that participants who made predictions under high accountability enjoyed the clip significantly less ($F(1, 250)=6.80, p<.01$) and expressed less desire to keep watching the clip ($F(1, 250)=12.71, p<.0005$) than participants in the other conditions.

Furthermore, we confirmed the moderating role of certainty on our findings. Participants who felt certain about the outcome did not mind predicting; in fact, they were equally likely, in both the prediction and no-prediction conditions, to enjoy ($M=2.19$ vs. 2.52 ; $F(1, 135)=0.21, p>.50$) and want to keep watching ($M=2.58$ vs. 3.27 ; $F(1, 135)=1.52, p>.20$) the video clip. In contrast, participants who were uncertain about the outcome were unhappy about predicting. They were significantly less likely to enjoy ($M=1.58$ vs. 3.84 ; $F(1, 114)=20.92, p<.0001$) and want to keep watching the show ($M=1.24$ vs. 4.10 ; $F(1, 114)=26.72, p<.0001$) than those who were not required to make predictions.

In conclusion, our research found that participants did not enjoy television shows as much when they made predictions as to the outcome of these shows. If we generalize beyond television shows, our results suggest that consumers will not enjoy hedonic

experiences where there is an element of risk involved as much when they predict the outcome of those experiences in advance. This could apply to all sorts of situations, such as going to an amusement park, where the prediction could be how much a new ride is enjoyed, to visiting a museum, where the prediction could be whether or not one's favorite paintings will be carried in a new exhibit. Thus, our research offers insights into factors that affect consumer happiness. Managerially, our findings suggest that the current practice of encouraging consumers to participate in interactive, online games and internet discussions about a consumption experience can actually backfire, in that consumers' resulting consumption enjoyment may be lowered.

"A Sunny-Day Measurement of Happiness"

Christopher Hsee, University of Chicago

The topic of happiness (broadly defined) is popular in both basic disciplines (e.g., psychology and economics) and applied fields (e.g., marketing, and HR management). Research on this topic has produced provocative findings. For example, paraplegics are nearly as happy as lottery winners (Brickman and Janoff-Bulman 1978; Ubel et al. 2004). Across generations when GDP and consumption increase in developed nations, happiness hardly increases (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Diener and Oishi 2000).

Most happiness research uses bounded labeled scales, such as a 7-point scale ranging from "very unhappy" to "very happy." These scales are susceptible to a serious bias: scale renorming. This bias casts doubt on the accuracy of many findings from the happiness literature. Consider two individuals, one earning \$15,000 a year and living in a country where most others earn only \$10,000 a year, and the other earning \$25,000 a year and living in a country where most others earn \$30,000 a year. When asked to report their happiness with their income on the 7-point scale described above, the \$15,000 earner reports greater happiness than the \$25,000 earner. We refer to this phenomenon as an income-happiness reversal.

What causes this reversal? We submit two explanations. One is genuine relativism. According to this explanation, the \$15,000 earner indeed feels happier than the \$25,000 earner. This may occur if the two individuals compare their income with their compatriots'. The \$15,000 earner finds his income higher than his compatriots' and feels happy, and the \$25,000 earner finds his income lower than his compatriots' and feels unhappy. The other explanation is scale-renorming or specious relativism. According to this explanation, the \$15,000 earner is actually less happy than the \$25,000 earner, but somehow he gives a higher happiness rating. This may occur if the two individuals norm (interpret) the rating scale differently. Each person may interpret the scale as descriptions of relative happiness between themselves and their compatriots. Because the \$15,000 earner earns more than his compatriots and the \$25,000 earner earns less than his compatriots, the \$15,000 earner gives a higher rating than the \$25,000 earner, even though in reality the \$15,000 earner is still less happy than the \$25,000 earner. This reversal is analogous to rating of bald eagle as bigger than a compact car (Kahneman et al. 1999), and rating of the number 9 as greater than the number 221 (Birnbaum 1999).

To recapitulate, genuine relativism is relativism in real feelings and is induced by psychological processes such as social comparison. Specious relativism is relativism in the interpretation of the scale and is an artifact due to scale-renorming. Traditionally-used Likert scales cannot discriminate the two types of relativisms.

To reduce specious relativism yet retain genuine relativism, we propose a modulus-based measurement—the sunny-day method. It is a combination of two psychophysical methods: magnitude estimation (Stevens 1975) and cross-modality matching (Stevens

and Marks 1980; Stevens and Greenbaum 1966), and yet is simpler than either method and can be practically used in large surveys. Specifically, we first ask respondents to consider their degree of happiness with a particular event (the modulus) as 10, and then rate their happiness with the events we are interested in studying (the targets) relative to their happiness with the modulus on an unbounded ratio scale, where 0 indicates no feeling. Because this procedure uses the modulus as a common yardstick and does not allow respondents to make arbitrary interpretations, we expect it to solve the scale-renorming problem.

In three studies, we found that the sunny-day scale is less susceptible to specious relativism than a traditional 7-point semantic differential scale. In one study, for example, respondents were first asked to predict, using either a traditional 7-point scale anchored by "very unhappy" and "very happy" or the sunny-day scale, the happiness of four individuals, each having found some money on the street. The four individuals were described in two separate scenarios:

Scenario 1 (consisting of the following two persons)
Person A found \$5 Person B found \$20

Scenario 2 (consisting of the following two persons)
Person C found \$30 Person D found \$500

The study was of a 2 (traditional scale vs. sunny-day scale) x 2 (with or without social-comparison) between-subject design. In the without-social-comparison condition, respondents were told that in both scenarios, the two money finders (A and B, and C and D) did not know each other and could not compare each other's windfall. Thus, objectively, Person B (who found \$20) could not possibly be happier than Person C (who found \$30). In the with-social-comparison condition, respondents were told that the two money-finders in each scenario knew how much the other found (but they did not know anything about the individuals in the other scenario). Thus, through social comparison, Person B (who found more than Person A and knew it) would naturally be happier than Person C (who found less than Person D and knew it).

In the traditional scale condition, Person B was rated as happier than Person C in both the with- and the without-social comparison conditions. The fact that Person B was rated happier than Person C in the without-social-comparison condition was a manifestation of scale renorming, or specious relativism.

In the sunny-day scale condition, Person B was rated as happier than Person C only in the social-comparison condition, and not in the without-social comparison condition. The findings suggest that the sunny-scale can avoid specious relativism (due to scale renorming), yet retain real relativism (due to social comparison).

What is the implication of this research for existing research that uses traditional semantic differential or Likert scales? On the one hand, readers, including researchers, media and policymakers, should interpret the findings with caution and not rush to conclusions. On the other hand, findings such as disabled people are nearly as happy as healthy people, and Americans today are not happier than Americans decades ago, may well reflect genuine feelings (Diener and Oishi 2000; Frederick and Loewenstein 1999; Kahneman 1999; Ubel et al. 2004; Wilson et al. 2000). However, in order to insure that these findings reflect real feelings, future researchers should consider using a modulus-based measure as a supplement to conventionally-used scales.

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The Transformative Potential of Feminist Critique in Consumer Research

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ABSTRACT

Given the importance of gender in consumer research, one might expect feminist perspectives to be at the forefront of critical engagement with consumer behavior theory. However, in recent years, critical, feminist voices have been barely audible. This paper explores the value of, and insights offered by, feminist theories and feminist activism, and how feminist theory and practice has altered our understanding of gendered consumption. It then argues that postmodern and postfeminist perspectives have diluted feminism's transformative potential, leading to a critical impasse in marketing and consumer research. In conclusion, we suggest that feminist perspectives, notably materialist feminism, may open up fresh new possibilities for critique, and interesting and worthwhile areas for transformative research in consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The value of critical perspectives on theory is uncontested in disciplines across the academy, as such perspectives challenge assumptions, stimulate debate, and bring about changes in current ways of thinking. Given the importance of gender in marketing and consumer research discourse, one might expect feminist perspectives to be at or near the forefront of critical engagement with consumer behavior theory. An upsurge of critical feminist voices during the 1990s, however, has been followed by a lull in recent times. This paper offers some explanation as to why this has happened. The paper begins with a brief review of how insights from feminist theories and feminist activism began to alter our understanding of gendered consumption. It then discusses how postmodern and postfeminist perspectives have diluted feminism as a potentially transformative critique, leading to what we consider is a critical impasse. Finally, we suggest ways in which to move beyond this impasse, and how feminist perspectives, specifically materialist feminism, may open up new possibilities for critique, together with new avenues for transformative research in consumer behavior.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Modern marketing has relied on gender to help conceptualize, understand and explain consumers and their behavior. Indeed the gender discourse of the marketplace is well-documented in our discipline. For decades marketers took it for granted that consumers were female (Frederick 1929). However, in spite of its omnipresence in marketing theory, research and practice, the concept of gender is not always well-understood or conceptualized in marketing and consumer behavior.

Consumer research on gender in the 1970s focused primarily on two gender-related topics, namely gender portrayals in advertising, and how gender identity could be used to conceptualize, understand and predict consumer behavior. Most of the advertising studies examined how women were portrayed and whether or not these portrayals altered in line with the changing role of women in society. Kacen and Nelson, however, in their 2002 study of gender portrayals in advertising, found little change in the ways that women have been represented over the decades. Similarly, the other main area of research, gender identity, or the extent to which a person identifies with masculine or feminine personality traits, has

also proved disappointing, with inconclusive results across a wide range of product studies (see Palan 2001).

Some researchers, however, took a more critical view, arguing that such approaches consistently failed to address the complexity of the relationship between gender and consumer behavior. Artz and Venkatesh (1991, p.619), for example, observed that studies of gender issues in marketing and advertising generated 'superficial and self-evident inferences', were devoid of theory, and were preoccupied with the single issue of sex stereotyping. A paradigm shift in the 1980s led to a shift in emphasis, and new theoretical and methodological perspectives began to emerge in consumer research, as anthropologists, sociologists and literary critics joined marketing departments (Belk 1995). These fresh perspectives explored wider consumption issues such as the meanings that consumers attached to products, how products were consumed, and how products were used to create and sustain identity and self-concept. This 'new' consumer research has recently been termed Consumer Culture Theory by Arnould and Thompson (2005). Whilst the term gender has no single and universally agreed meaning, most consumer researchers in the Consumer Culture Theory tradition accept that gender is a socio-cultural category which refers to the ways that men and women are socialized into male and female roles. As such, Consumer Culture Theory problematizes the category of gender, and challenges traditional, ontological tendencies to essentialize men and women.

The paradigm shift in consumer behavior research in the 1980s brought to the fore new perspectives, some of which mirrored the development of feminist theories on gender and research methodologies in other disciplines. Feminist methodologies stress parity between researcher and informant, and researcher involvement in the research process to minimize 'otherness' (Madriz 2000). They also privilege consumers (readers) rather than producers and products (authors and texts), and emphasize the importance of context and the 'lived experience' of informants, rather than 'expert' interpretations of consumer experience (Rinehart 1998; Andrews and Talbot 2000). Above all, feminist research addresses social change and political equality. The concepts of transformation and praxis: 'the struggle to unite theory and practice in action and reflection upon the world in order to transform it for women' (Humm 1995, p. 218), is central to its aims. We now turn to the application of feminist theory in consumer research.

The first papers in the consumer research literature to draw on feminist perspectives were by Stern (1992), Bristor and Fischer (1993), Hirschman (1993), Fischer and Bristor (1994), Joy and Venkatesh (1994) and Peñaloza, (1994). These authors showed how theory and knowledge in marketing and consumer research was gendered in taken-for-granted, unarticulated, unrecognized, and, above all, profound ways. Stern (1992), for example, applied feminist literary theory to the interpretation of advertisements. Fischer and Bristor (1994) deconstructed the rhetoric of marketing relationships. These authors argued that the discourse associated with the marketer/consumer relationship revealed parallels to that between male and female. Specifically, they argued that notions of seduction and patriarchy were woven into that relationship. In a similar vein, Hirschman (1993) examined the ideology expressed in articles published in the 1980 and 1990 volumes of the *Journal of Consumer Research*. She concluded that the dominant ideology

The consumer society wants us to believe that in order to be happy, we need to constantly buy newer and better things. Life becomes a never-ending pursuit of the attributes of success. I'm using the word "attributes" because our society doesn't really want us to strive to be truly successful or happy. It wants us to strive to look so. A few decades ago, life was much simpler than it is now. For this reason, people's understanding of happiness and life satisfaction was also much simpler. Today, it's much more difficult to feel accomplished and satisfied with all these expectations and pressure the society is putting on us. As a result, we struggle to appreciate what we have and to be grateful for all the good things in our lives.

Session Chair: Angela Y. Lee and Discussion Leader: Dipankar Chakravarti (2006), "Understanding Consumer Enjoyment and Happiness", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 33, eds. Connie Pechmann and Linda Price, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 218-222. Download. Authors. Session Chair: Angela Y. Lee, Northwestern University Discussion Leader: Dipankar Chakravarti, University of Colorado at Boulder. Volume. NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 33 | 2006. Share Proceeding. Featured papers. Becoming an Association for Consumer Research member is simple. Membership in ACR is relatively inexpensive, but brings significant benefits to its members. Join ACR now! Happiness is something which we can't describe in words it can only be felt from someone's expression of a smile. Likewise, happiness is a signal or identification of good and prosperous life. Read the full essay on happiness here. 500+ Words Essay on Happiness. Happiness is something which we can't describe in words it can only be felt from someone's expression of a smile. Likewise, happiness is a signal or identification of good and prosperous life. But for being happy in a relationship we have to understand that there are some rules or mutual understanding that keeps a relationship healthy and happy. Firstly, take care of yourself then your partner because if you yourself are not happy then how can you make your partner happy. Consumption and happiness: alternative approaches. Amitava Krishna Dutt Department of Economics and Policy Studies. University of Notre Dame Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA. Rough draft prepared for the conference on New Directions in the Study of Happiness, University of Notre Dame, IN, 46556.

1. Introduction The standard approach to consumer behavior in economics takes utility to be a positive function of the level of consumption of goods and services, an approach which is taken to imply that the level of satisfaction, or happiness, increases when a person consumes more.